



Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs



Professional Boundaries

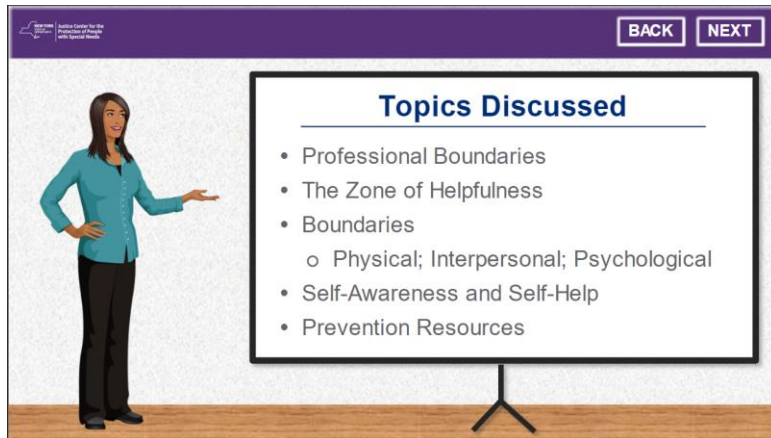
An Interactive Training for Service Providers Supporting People Receiving Services from Children and Family Services

Participant Guide

Course Overview

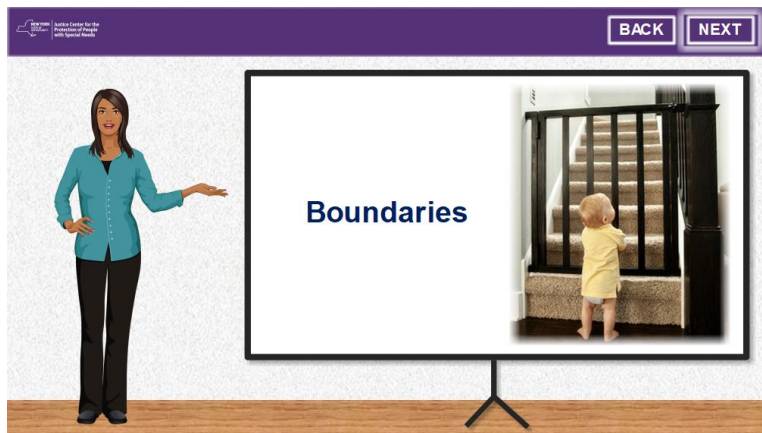
This training was developed by NYS Justice Center for People with Special Needs to support the use of professional boundaries in the provision of care at provider agencies. At the Justice Center, we recognize that professional boundaries play a key role in preventing abuse and neglect and providing good quality of care.

This training will define professional boundaries and discuss a concept called zone of helpfulness. This information should be used to discuss case scenarios covering three types of boundaries physical, interpersonal, and psychological. This training will culminate with a discuss of self-awareness and self-help and finish by looking at tools and resources available from the Justice Center.



During this training we will define professional boundaries and discuss a concept called the zone of helpfulness. We'll then apply what we've learned to case scenarios covering three types of boundaries - physical, interpersonal, and psychological.

We will discuss the importance of self-awareness and self-help and finish by looking at tools and resources available from the Justice Center.

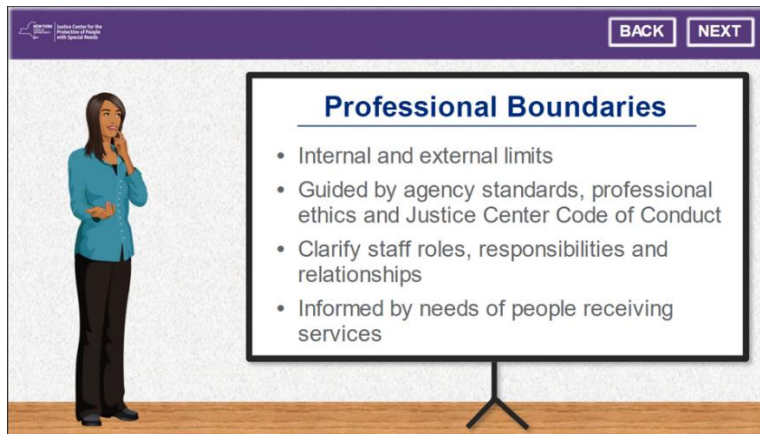


What image comes to mind when you hear the word boundary?

What are your personal boundaries?

A simple definition of a boundary is a separation between two things or a line that sets the limits of an area.

Personal Boundaries are limits or parameters that we establish for ourselves and things that belong to us, and for others and things that do not belong to us.



Professional Boundaries are founded on the standards set by your agency, the ethics of your profession, and the Justice Center Code of Conduct. They help to clarify your responsibilities as a service provider, and shape how you build relationships with people receiving services.

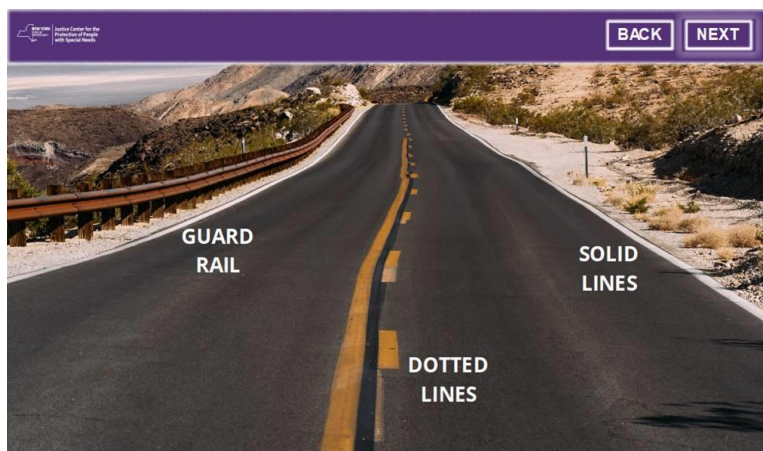
Maintaining professional boundaries includes understanding the standards set through agency policy and regulations and working within them to respect the personal boundaries of people who receive your services and of others you interact with in the workplace.



As a service provider, your primary role is to promote the health and safety of people receiving services while providing a therapeutic environment that supports their growth and development.

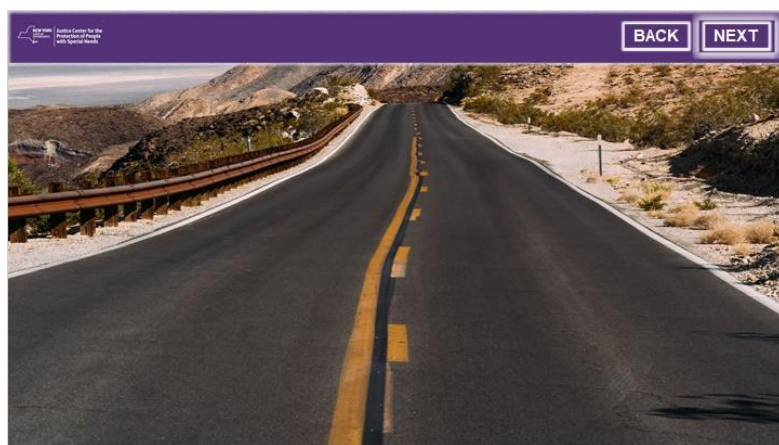
Professional boundaries are vital to achieving these goals and protect the health and safety of people receiving services. For example, requiring visitors to identify themselves before entering a program or residence is a protective boundary. Professional boundaries are also empowering and can support a person's growth, independence, and personal rights.

When you set healthy boundaries, you serve as a positive role model to people receiving services and you help them build the skills need to set healthy limits with others. Professional boundaries also protect you from engaging in inappropriate relationships and limiting your ability to work effectively with people receiving services, or even jeopardizing your job.



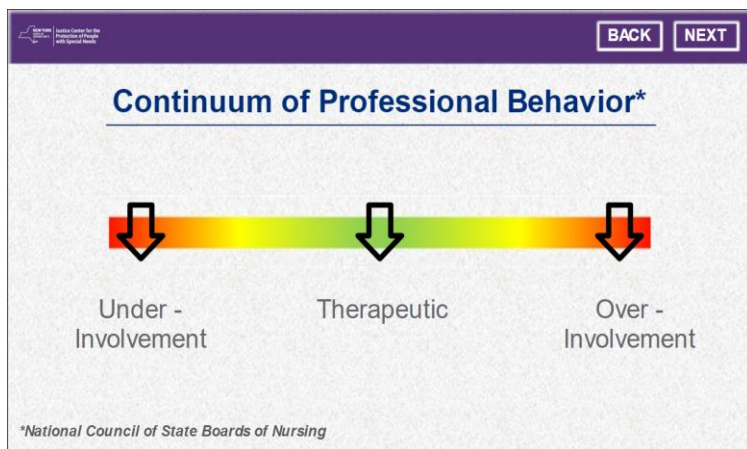
What is it about this highway, that keeps people safe?

The paved road, the guard rail, the white lines and the yellow lines are all boundaries designed to keep drivers, their passengers, and others on the road safe.



Does your agency have a professional boundaries policy?

You, like a driver on this highway, are responsible for the service you provide, the driving you do. Similarly, your agency, like the highway department, is responsible for maintaining a safe facility, effective policies, and procedures, and providing training and adequate staffing to keep you and others safe, and to offer the best possible services to people in your programs.



Write an example of a situation in which you were in the green zone or therapeutic helpfulness zone.

Your interactions with people receiving services can be viewed on a continuum. Consider this continuum as a guide to help identify when your thoughts, feelings and interactions are within a therapeutic and professional range. By therapeutic, we mean, having a healing effect, or tending to make a person healthier.

The far left and far right red zones are like the guard rails on a highway. The most egregious examples of abuse and neglect, described here as extreme under-involvement and extreme over-involvement, fit on these ends of the continuum. It is your responsibility to strive to stay in the green, therapeutic zone and your agency's responsibility to provide the information and resources you need to stay in the green zone, also known as the zone of helpfulness.

Are You in the Zone?

1. Agency Policy
2. Codes of Conduct/Ethics
3. Gray Area
4. Follow-up

- ✓ What is my agency policy?
- ✓ Are my actions in line with the Justice Center Code of Conduct and other professional codes of ethics that I am required to follow?
- ✓ Is this a gray area that needs further discussion with a supervisor?
- ✓ When can I follow-up with a supervisor or team to review this situation?

Session 1: Understanding a Person's Best Interest

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Understanding a Person's Best Interest

Are my actions in the person's best interests?




Understanding a person's best interests is also necessary to staying in the Zone of Helpfulness. When you are facing similarly challenging circumstances in your professional life, asking yourself the following may help to clarify the question of best interests.

- ✓ Does the person have a care plan that would help to identify their needs and best interests in this circumstance?
- ✓ How well do you know the person's history and understand their therapeutic needs?
- ✓ Are there long-term effects to consider that may not be in the person's best interests?
- ✓ Are there broader range effects to consider, including the impact on other people receiving services?
- ✓ Have similar circumstances occurred before with this person and, as a result, was anything learned?

Session 1: Understanding a Person's Best Interest

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Case Scenarios




Physical	
Interpersonal	
Psychological	

As you read these scenarios, consider the following.


- ✓ What is the best interest of people receiving services?
- ✓ Can you see why some actions undermine the therapeutic environment?
- ✓ Based on what you've learned, what approach may have been better?

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Physical Boundaries




Touch



Personal Space



Personal Property



Privacy

Touch refers to how, when, and why we touch others and how, when and why, we allow others to touch us.

Personal Space is the physical distance that we maintain between ourselves and others.


Personal Property includes belongings, such as clothing, a person's wheelchair, hygiene products and food.

Privacy includes how we maintain physical privacy in our homes, including closed doors, locks, phone calls and visitor logs.

Physical Boundaries Scenario

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Good Morning, Baby!



Questions to Consider

Rosie, a health care provider, recently moved to the U.S. and works at a residential program for youth. Bernie receives residential services and meets Rosie, who greets him with "Good morning, baby!" and a hug. Bernie feels uncomfortable but he keeps quiet. When returning to his activity, Bernie sees Rosie again and she kisses him on the cheek and says, "Buenos noches, mi amor!"

Bernie reported the interaction to his resident manager. When it was addressed with Rosie, by her supervisor, Rosie defended her actions, saying that in her culture, showing affection means you care about the other person and that's always how she's acted.

1. What boundaries were crossed?

2. Does Bernie want to be called “baby” and hugged?

3. Even if Bernie did enjoy being called baby and being hugged, is that in Bernie’s best interest?

4. Is that in the best interest of others who may also be present, or who may hear about the interaction from Bernie?

5. Does Rosie’s hugging mean that she cares more than other staff who don’t hug?

6. How do you show that you care about someone without touching them or calling them pet names?

7. Would asking how they are doing, telling them your glad to see them, or making a kind facial gesture or wave work?

8. What could Rosie’s supervisor do to show respect of cultural difference, while at the same time, reinforcing boundaries?

Interpersonal Boundaries

Topics of Conversation Time and Place Self-Presentation Social Media

How much information do you disclose?

Interpersonal boundaries include topics of conversation, time and place, self-presentation and social media. Some guidelines on self-disclosure to maintain good professional boundaries include:

- ✓ Do not disclose information to a person receiving services that you are not comfortable sharing with your supervisor and others in your workplace.
- ✓ Never convey to a person receiving services that they are expected to keep personal information you share with them secret or confidential.
- ✓ If you become aware that a person receiving services has overheard or perhaps been a part of a questionable personal conversation with staff, share that information with your supervisor or others on your team.

Interpersonal Boundaries Scenario #1

It's Our Little Secret

Mia is a 16-year-old in a residential program. Riley, is a residence counselor who dates Mia's cousin and they are friends on Instagram. Riley posts a picture on Instagram from a party. Mia tells him he looks "hot" in the picture.

Riley is worried if he blocks Mia on Instagram that she will be upset. He asks her not to tell anyone about their Instagram connection. When Riley sees Mia coming out of the bathroom, smelling like marijuana, later that day, she reminds Riley of their "secret."

Questions to Consider

1. What boundaries were crossed?


2. What should Riley have done differently when reminded of their secret?

3. What could Riley have done earlier on when Mia told him, he looked hot in the picture?

Interpersonal Boundaries Scenario #2

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You Think You've Got Problems!

Chris is a counselor who supports Lance, a young person receiving services. Chris visits Lance but is preoccupied by his own family issues. Lance says he hasn't been feeling well and says he might as well just disappear since his family doesn't care about him. Chris replies, "You think you've got problems! I think my partner is cheating on me!"

[Questions to Consider](#)

1. What boundaries were crossed?

2. Did Chris fulfill his responsibilities?

3. Did Chris attend to Lance's needs?

4. Is this an example of under-involvement, over-involvement or in the zone of therapeutic helpfulness and why?

5. What should Chris have done differently in this situation?

6. What can Chris do to process their own feelings they are struggling with?

7. What can Chris do to prepare themselves for future similar situations and how to best respond?



Do you mind read?

What are your thoughts about personalizing?

Psychological boundaries are about our thoughts and feelings. While our internal world of thoughts and feelings is less concrete than our external world of physical and interpersonal behavior, good psychological boundaries are the foundation of strong external boundaries.

Thought processes that indicate we are moving out of our lane include things like mind-reading, overidentifying with a person, personalizing someone's behavior and romanticizing the relationship.




Other thought processes that can indicate you are moving out of your lane include romanticizing a relationship with a person receiving services or thoughts about harming a person receiving services in other ways, veering well out of your lane and into the guard rail. Thoughts like these are red flags that requires immediate attention, to prevent harm to the person receiving services, and to ensure your own health and safety.

Self-awareness is key to developing and maintaining good psychological boundaries and recognizing red flags. If you notice any of these red flags in another staff member or experience them yourself, speak with a trusted supervisor to help prevent an incident of abuse from occurring.

Psychological Boundaries Scenario #1

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Just My Type

Libby just got her first job working at a residential services program for youth. One of the young men receiving services, Antonio, reminds Libby of a guy she had a crush on in high school and, after several months, she finds herself really looking forward to her shifts.

She volunteers to work with Antonio whenever she can. She has complimented his smile and said that she can tell he works out by the shape he's in. This week, while taking him to an appointment, she tells him that he is "just her type of guy."

Questions to Consider

1. What boundaries were crossed?

2. Did Libby fulfill her responsibilities?

3. Did Libby attend to Antonio's needs?

4. Is this an example of under-involvement, over-involvement or in the zone of therapeutic helpfulness and why?


5. What should Libby have done differently?

6. What can Libby do to process her own feelings about this situation? To prepare her for future similar situations and how to best respond?

Psychological Boundaries Scenario #2

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Because I Said So!

Tom is a Residence Counselor who works in a Residential Treatment Facility. While getting dinner ready, Tom says to Frank, who resides at the program, "Hey Frank, come set the table, it's your turn. Frank is watching a show and replies, "I don't want to." Tom is busy finishing meal prep and replies, "I don't care if you don't want to, come and do it" Frank yells back, "I said I don't want to do it, leave me alone!" Tom approaches Frank sitting on the couch, picks up the remote, turns off the TV, walks away with the remote and says, "I said get up and do it!"

Questions to Consider

1. What boundaries were crossed

2. Did Tom fulfill his responsibilities?

3. What were Tom's triggers?

4. What risks are presented by this interaction?

5. What could Tom have done to prevent conflict?

6. What could Tom have done to contain his emotional reaction to Frank's behavior?

7. What could Tom have done to deal with Frank's resistance?



Self-Awareness and healthy self-care strategies are important skills to learn that will help you to maintain effective psychological boundaries and offer benefits both personally and professionally.

Personal reactions to people or situations at work can greatly influence how you conduct yourself. Developing awareness of your personal triggers gives you the opportunity to use self-care strategies that can help you to regain the calm, clarity, and composure you need to take care of yourself and provide quality care for others.



What strategies do you use, to prepare for the day ahead, and to handle stressful situations you may encounter throughout your day?

Getting adequate nutrition, sleep and exercise are a few important behavior-based self-care strategies that can help you feel better prepared for your day.

Practicing mindfulness and constructive self-talk are cognitive strategies that can help you to both prepare for your day and manage emotional stressors when they arise. These strategies can help you tap into more productive, rational and objective thoughts, to cope with your personal reactions and to solve problems more effectively.

A strong team connection within your agency, and other community resources are also very useful tools to support both your personal and professional wellbeing. All of these and other self-care you may already be using, can help you to think, feel and act better. To care for others, it is important that you take care of yourself.



Some external challenges to professional boundaries that you may encounter include: inadequate training, supervision and peer support, unclear agency guidance or policies, an inadequate physical environment at the facility, or an agency culture that doesn't reinforce and support professional boundaries. If these conditions exist in your workplace, talk about them with your team and administration and consider ways that you can foster improvements in these areas.

One way to take further positive action is to increase your knowledge of abuse prevention strategies that you can use, to safeguard people receiving services in your agency. Never underestimate the importance of the work that you do to support vulnerable people.

At the Justice Center, we value your effort and have created several abuse prevention resources to support you in our shared mission: to provide good care to people receiving services in New York State.



What are your ideas for preventing abuse or neglect?

As a quick recap we defined boundaries and their importance in achieving our professional responsibilities, maintaining a therapeutic environment, and providing for the best interests of people receiving services.

We explored case scenarios covering examples of physical, interpersonal, and psychological boundaries, and we talked about the value of self-awareness and self-care strategies for maintaining boundaries and managing stressful situations.

Report Abuse and Neglect: 1-855-373-2122

Individual Family Support Unit: 1-800-624-4143

General Information and Resources: 1-800-624-4143

If you have any suggestions regarding the prevention of abuse or neglect, we'd love to hear from you. Please email us at prevention@justicecenter.ny.gov.

We encourage you to discuss what you learned today with your co-workers – maintaining professional boundaries is always easier with team support!
